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## Maine Women's Insider (August 2006)

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*Maine Women's Giving Tree*

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# INSIDER

A publication of the Maine Women's Lobby and Maine Women's Policy Center

## Women's Advocate at the Legislature Moves On

Dear Friends,

Our lobbyist has a huge job and equally expansive network of legislators, advocates, and Augusta-area politicians. So it is no surprise that news of **Lauralee Raymond's** transition from the Maine Women's Lobby has traveled fast.



Lauralee instructs us as to the location of her hometown in Aroostook County.

Which is not to say we're adjusting quickly to her announcement that she will be ending her tenure with the

Maine Women's Lobby and heading to Chicago for a change in direction on October 1.

Those of you who have met and worked with Lauralee, the Maine Women's Lobby representative at the Legislature since 2003, know that we are losing a passionate and skilled advocate. During Lauralee's time at the Lobby, first as Legislative Coordinator and then as Public Affairs Director,

she quickly became a solid source of information for legislators, leaders, and the press. She represented the Maine Women's Lobby in dozens of coalitions and at the State House. She organized media events, countless strategy sessions, speaking engagements, and rallies. She led our successful efforts to raise the minimum wage, guarantee protections for survivors of violence, maintain unemployment insurance for part-time workers, uphold reproductive freedom, and so much more.

Most importantly, she has been a steadfast and passionate advocate for women and for social justice. We will miss her intellect, great humor, ability to connect with people, and leadership far beyond her years!



Lauralee (right, wearing hat) models circa 1900 suffragette wear for a Women's Equality Day commemoration.

Please join me in wishing Lauralee many happy returns, and look for an announcement about a new Director of Public Policy in the months to come.

- Sarah Standiford, Executive Director



### Maine Women's Lobby

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## Erin's Law Promises Reform

### New Task Force Focuses on Workplace Violence

On January 2, 2005, **Erin Sperrey**, a young Presque Isle artist, poet, and employee of Tim Horton's in Caribou, was sexually assaulted and murdered by her co-worker, Christopher Shumway. This month, a judge found Shumway guilty of robbery, gross sexual assault, and murder.

Over the past decade, homicides have been a leading cause of death for all workers and the leading cause of occupational death for women workers. This case brought into sharp focus what survivors, supporters, and advocates have long understood: violence is a workplace issue.

During this legislative session, the Maine Women's Lobby joined with sexual assault and domestic violence prevention advocates in supporting L.D. 1699, creating a task force to address the problem of workplace violence. The bill was initiated by **Representative Jeremy Fischer** at the request and with the ongoing advocacy of Erin's mother, **Johnna Lovely**. The final resolve required the Department of Labor to coordinate a task force to conduct a study of the issues relating to violence in the workplace for the purpose of improving workplace safety and reducing workplace violence. The task force is also required to submit a report to the Labor Committee with its findings and recommendations.

Maine Women's Lobby Director of Public Affairs, **Lauralee Raymond**, and Maine Women's Lobby Board Secretary, **Anna Melbin**, are representing women on this task force. The group, which is meeting frequently throughout the fall, will consider policies and practices that can help prevent and reduce workplace violence such as establishing violence intervention policies, use of panic buttons and security systems, and examining labor practices in after-hours establishments.

The Maine Women's Lobby is committed to finding real solutions to a problem that affects Maine families and communities so deeply. "No workplace is immune from issues of violence. We all have a responsibility to provide a safe and secure worker environment," said **Sarah Standiford**, Director of the Maine Women's Lobby. "We hope that Erin's tragic story will help mobilize the task force - and our decision makers - to enact legislative solutions to the problem of workplace violence. **We can prevent future tragedies from occurring.**"

## Women and the Environment

### Collaborative Project Launched to Encourage Women to Advocate for Safer Chemicals

Learning disabilities, autism, breast cancer, asthma, and other health problems are on the rise. Our environment has an effect on these health problems in a complex mix with social factors and the genes we inherit. In fact, scientists have linked exposure to toxic chemicals to 180 different diseases and conditions. For example, too much mercury in fish causes learning disabilities in young children.



Environmental health advocates petition the Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner, David Littell, for prevention policies.

Research has also shown that women and children are often disproportionately affected by exposure because our physiological systems respond differently than men's do to toxic chemicals, and we encounter toxins frequently in our homes, schools, and

workplaces. That's why women have an important role to play in demanding safer products. The Maine Women's Policy Center has joined with the Environmental Health Strategy Center and the Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund to kick off a new campaign focused on women's health and the environment. "Simply put, our system to prevent exposure to dangerous chemicals is broken. Thousands of industrial chemicals are used in common consumer products. But no laws exist to require safer alternatives or safety testing for the vast majority of chemicals on the market," says **Mike Belliveau**, Executive Director of the Environmental Health Strategy Center.

The Strategy Center has led the Alliance for a Clean & Healthy Maine, of which the Maine Women's Policy Center and other reproductive health advocates are members, in taking strides to remove lead, mercury, arsenic, and toxic flame retardant chemicals from common consumer products in Maine.

Now we're working toward a new, comprehensive safer chemicals policy to protect our health in homes, schools, and workplaces. Together, we'll encourage Maine women to advocate for policies that will eliminate unnecessary toxic chemicals in our environment.